



PITHAPUR RAJAH'S GOVERNMENT COLLEGE

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Dignitaries Rajahmundry Women

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Abstract

Rajahmundry, a historic town located on the banks of the Godavari River in Andhra Pradesh, has played a crucial role in the political, economic, and cultural development of the Telugu people. Known for its rich history dating back to the time of the Eastern Chalukyas, the town also holds significant importance in the Indian independence movement. Women from Rajahmundry were integral to this struggle, with figures such as Smt. Kandukuri Rajyalakshmi, a social reformer who advocated for women's rights alongside her husband, Sri Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu, making notable contributions. Other prominent women freedom fighters from the region include Durgabai Deshmukh, Batula Kamakshamma, and Duvvuri Subbamma, all of whom played vital roles in shaping the region's social and political landscape.

Rajahmundry is one of the well-known towns not only in Andhra Pradesh, but also in India. It stands on the Eastern Bank of the great river Godavari, in the East Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh. During medieval ages it was the political, economic, social and cultural foundation of the Telugu people. From the time, it became the capital of the Eastern Chalukyas to the present time it has an unbroken history.

Women played an important part in Rajahmundry's independence struggle. Smt Kandukuri Rajyalakshmi was a social reformer who along with her husband, Sri Kandukuri Veeresalingam Pantulu played an important role in improving women's rights in India during the British Rule. Some of the famous freedom fighters include Durgabai Deshmukh, Batula Kamakshamma, Duvvuri Subbamma, etc.

KANDUKURI RAJYALAKSHMI: It is said that behind the success of every man there is a woman behind. It is more than true in the case of Veeresalingam, the father of Andhra Renaissance. His wife Rajyalakshmi being always in the background actually supported her husband in every one of his social reformative activities. She stood as a bulwark. Encouraged him. Infused determination. She molded her own life ideals in tune with her husband's and thus proved herself a real "Sahadharmacharini". She elected her husband's way of life to be her's too. She never believed in the Man-Made Caste System. All human beings are children of God. This was her belief. She treated child widows as her own

children and showered affection on them. She encouraged such child widows to marry. She was particularly compassionate and considerate towards destitute women deceived by males. She used to cook food for them and serve it herself with kindness and affection.

Smt Kandukuri Rajyalakshmi stood undaunted and encountered very bravely the onslaughts of the petrified orthodox, their threats and angry attacks made in connection with the first Widow Marriage conducted in Rajahmundry on 11.12.1881. Neither, the threat of excommunication from the rigid orthodox nor the tearful appeals of her close relatives nor their curses could swerve, Smt Kandukuri Rajyalakshmi from her determination and courageous convictions about the difficult path chosen by her. When servants refused to serve, she used to go to the Godavari and fetch water in pitchers all by herself. If, Smt Kandukuri Rajyalakshmi had not supported with her will like this, probably Veeresalingam could not have achieved his aims in social reformation and become the father of Renaissance.

DURGABAI DESHMUKH: Her maiden name was “Gummididala Durgabai”, she was born on 15.07.1909 in Rajahmundry. Her father was BVS Rama Rao. Even, at the age of 12, she entered the national political scene at the influence of Gandhiji. Being proficient in Hindi, she translated the speeches of Gandhiji when he toured Andhra in 1921. Privately passing the Matric and Intermediate Examinations. Durgabai took B.A (Honours) Degree from the Andhra University in 1939. She obtained B.L Degree in 1942. She practiced in the Federal Court for a short time. She participated in the Salt Satyagraha in 1930 and Quit India Movement in 1942 and was sent to prison for many a time. Later, in her varied career, she occupied the following posts.

In 1946, she became a Member of the Constituent Assembly of India. In 1947 she was a member of Parliament. She was a member of the Planning Commission in the year 1953-54 and was the Chairperson of the Central Social Welfare Board during the year 1953-62. She was also a member of Delhi Andhra Education Sangham, Nari Niketan, Blind Relief Organization Council for Social Development. She edited the journal “Social Welfare of India”. She was the first Chairperson of National Education Council. She was a representative of India to attend the world Food Congress in Washington in 1963. She married at the age of 43, Dr Chintamani Dwarakanath Deshmukh, the renowned economist and scholar. In 1958, she founded the Andhra Mahila Sabha in Madras, Hyderabad and an adjunct to it established a Relief Centre for the disabled and a hospital too.

Efforts for development of Education: She started a School in Delhi in the year 1948, which later became the Venkateswara College. Similarly, she established a Women's College near the Osmania University in Hyderabad. She was uncontentious and did not wear even a small gold jewel or silk clothes at any time.

HONOURS: The Andhra University conferred a honorary doctorate in 1963. In 1971, she got the Nehru literacy Award. In 1975, she became a Padmavibhushan. In 1976, she got the Paul Hopeman Award. President's N. Sanjiva Reddi and Zakir Hussain used to

affectionately and appreciatively call her “Andhra Mahila”. She was childless and died on 09.05.1981.

ADDEPALLI VIVEKANANDA DEVI: In the world of women Vivekananda Devi is an exemplar with abundance of self-confidence, she rose like a meteor in the feminine community. She was a cultured woman who distinguished herself as a social worker, activist for women's progress, novelist, playwright authoress, translator, expert in children's literature, poetess, speaker and litterateur. To enlighten the children, she started a school “Nivedita Kishore Vihar” in 1953, Smt Kandukuri Rajyalakshmi Women's College for higher Education for women, Smt Addepalli Mahalakshmi College of Education for Women for educational advancement of women for careers as teachers. She was educational relative of women. She got Smt Kandukuri Rajyalakshmi Award, Durgabai Deshmukh award, Gurazada Apparao Award, and Jeanne Harris Award. Her titles include “Vidya Bandhu” and “Sanghaseva Dhureena”. She was born in Pulla in West Godavari District to Naraharasetti Venkataratnam Naidu and Ramanujamma couple as eldest of their issue. She was a B.A., B.Ed., She obtained proficiency in Telugu, English, Sanskrit and Hindi. She played on the violin and Veena. She was married to Addepalli Nageswara Rao and imbibed his qualities and those of her father. In “Nivedita Kishore Vihar” started by her in the year 1953 instruction is imparted in Telugu and English mediums. In 1968, as Secretary, she founded the Smt Kandukuri Rajyalakshmi Women's college, and in 1977 a Women's college of Education named after her daughter-in-law, Mahalakshmi Devi. She strove hard for women's educational progress and enlightenment. She helped many women earn their livelihood catering well to their educational and other needs. She conducted a press for some years in the Veeresalingam's Widows Home. Having a close intimacy with Durgabai Deshmukh, she became Chairperson of the After-care Home. She also worked as an advisory member of the Central Prison, East Godavari. Lok Adalat as social worker, a member of the Central Library Authority, a member of the legal Aid Committee, and discharged her duties efficiently well. She translated about 21 books for the United States Information Service and South Indian Language Book Trust. Right from her childhood, she had served Women's cause and for their enlightenment. At the invitation of American Printers, she went to America, Scotland, England, Italy, South Africa and other countries in the company of her husband. In due recognition of her sustained, services to society, especially the women, many honours and prestigious awards were heaped on her with spiritual Kinship with Omkar Swamy of Totapalli Hills, she strove hard to improve the Ashrama and its surroundings there too. She passed away on 11.02.2003. Vivekananda Devi's commitment to service, dedication to ideals is a standing example for women to follow and benefit thereby.

BATTULA KAMAKSHAMMA (ANDHRA ANNIE BESANT): Those who see and wonder at the Vysya Seva Sadanam on the banks of the Godavari, should also know about its improver-benefactress, Battula Kamakshamma hailed as “Andhra Annie Besant” 71 A Pious Woman who had confirmed belief in the adages “This body is, for the help to others”, and service to humanity is service to God' and put them into the practice. At the

age of thirteen, even though she lost her husband and father too, she was not dispirited. Reading and digesting the contents of all classical and pauranic books and literary ones of those days she used to disseminate the information to other women and made them enlightened. By sheer self-effort she became an “Ubhaya Bhash Praveena”. The founder of Vysya Seva Sadanam, Nalam Ramalingayya, impressed by her intellectual prowess and organizational abilities, appointed her to be incharge of the institution. Dedicating herself in a spirit of whole-hearted service to it for thirty-six years she strove relentlessly as Principal and Organizer to uplift the institution to the status of a premier educational Center and improved it in many ways. At the age of retirement the government wanted her to retire but she vehemently argued that retirement was only for the body but not for the mind. When we hear the name of “Seva Sadanam”, we are irresistibly reminded of the wonderful services rendered by Kamakshamma to the destitute and unlettered women folk. Going about the country, she used to pick up women discarded by her husbands, widows and orphan women and admit them in the Sadanam and brighten their darkened lives. She used to impart to them necessary training in crafts and education to make them confident to earn their livelihood. She used to discover their latent talents in literature, music and the arts and promote their progress. Hers was a Dimond like determination. That, was why she was able to register many stupendous successes in her aims and endeavors. She was a great Bhakta. She had noble character, rectitude and altruistic temperament. Spending her time in spiritual pursuits on the one side, she used to engage herself in social service activities. She held many positions of importance. She presided over the “Arya Mahila Vysya” meeting held in Guntur in 1924. In 1946, she presided over the exhibition conducted by the Andhra Mahasabha in Nandyal. As a Municipal Councilor and Bench Magistrate, she rendered service to the citizens. She was a senator of the Andhra University and made her voice heard there. In recognition of her services titles like “Andhra Annie Besant”, “Vidya Pradayini”, “Sangha Seva Dhureena” were conferred on her. She lived a meaningful life of a thousand months. While still alive, she gifted away all her personal effects. She had no family of her own but, she was one who considered the entire world as her big and intimate family.

DUVVURI SUBBAMMA (DESABANDHAVI): In Andhra Desa, innumerable men and women without reference to orthodoxy and modernism, participated in the freedom movement. She was a native of Rajahmundry, who sacrificed her all for the country's cause. Her physical or mental pangs of widowhood or traditional customs or mores could not deter or deflect her from the determined path of patriotic service. Supporting a resolution moved by “Bulusu Samba Murthy” for “Purna Swaraj” at the District Congress meeting held in the year 1921 in Kakinada, with Tanguturi Prakasam in the chair, she made an inspiring speech. She knew the contents of Mahabharata and Bhagavatam by heart. Added to that, she had a fine voice. Her speeches interspersed with and interpreted in the light of the stanzas in Bharatam and Bhagavatam spotlighting Gandhian methods, were inspiring the people. Sensing her extraordinary powers of eloquence and spell-binding spirit of patriotism, Gandhiji entrusted her with the task of propagating the Congress ideals throughout the Andhra. Knowing, the hold she exercised on the people of the District

Collector, GTH Bracken filed a case against her and arrested. She had to undergo rigorous imprisonment for a year. The Collector misthought that she would ask for pardon not able to get on with the unorthodox food and other ways of life in the prison as she came from an orthodox family. Even refusing to ask for pardon orally, she suffered imprisonments cheerfully and with courage. In 1930, "Salt Satyagraha" also she participated and was imprisoned. She participated in all the national patriotic activities. She was alive when India attained Independence and felt extremely happy. With belief in our Sanatana Dharma, she established a Sanatana Women's Educational Institution in Rajahmundry and wished for a classless, casteless welfare State. The Andhra Mahasabha conferred on her the title "Desabandhavi" and honored itself. She died on 31st May 1964 in her 84th year.

PULAVARTI KAMALADEVI: If inclination (taste), opportunity and fortune are favorable, there is nothing that women cannot achieve, and that there is no successful summit they cannot ascend. This was proved by Kavitalaka Pulavarthi Kamaladevi. She was a writer and speaker, imbued with patriotic spirit. In 1906, born as a daughter in the Kancherla family in Rajahmundry. She became the daughter-in-law of Pulavartis. Her first novel related to war, with the Italy Abyssinian war as her theme for the novel, she described the atrocities perpetrated by Italy in a vivid and impressive way. With a view to inspiring the country's youth she wrote "Veerabharata Katha Manjari. Her novel was prescribed for non-detailed study of the S.S.L.C. students of the Madras Presidency. She obtained eulogistic remarks from the literary great for her novels "Radhika Chandravali". "Mirzamukah", and "Vijayabhaskara Vijayam". At a meeting of the Vysyas at Peddapuram, the then District Collector Tumpudi Bhagavantam Gupta, not only honored her with the title "Kavitalaka". But, also presented a gold medal. In 1937, she won the "Gruhalakshmi Swarna Kankanam". In 1973, she was felicitated by the A.P. Sahitya Akademi as a special writer with great talents. As writer, Kamaladevi received many felicitations and prizes. She was a fine speaker. It would appear that her three-hour long speech as a counselor in the council Meeting attracted the attention of one and all as a great peroration. As member of the governing council of Vysya Seva Sadanam she rendered unstinted and sustained service for the improvement and progress of Sadanam.

Apart from all the afore-mentioned distinguished persons, many other prominent public personalities contributed their might in enhancing the fame and prestige of Rajahmundry city.

Conclusions

Many great women personalities of the city reminiscing about the past glory of this beautiful city are playing a key-sole in active politics, poets and artistes are striving hard for a cultural renaissance. Social reformers, literary service-minded persons, are extending their helping serviceable hand for the progress of the society and for promotion of religious tolerance and harmony. I do hope that, the glory of Rajahmundry city will again spread in all directions. In future, apart from its hoary past and progressive present.

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